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SUBJECT: LIBERIA: UNMIL DRAWDOWN - GETTING THE PACE RIGHT

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In consultations on September 9, a majority of Security Council members favored the Secretary-General's recommendation for a modestly accelerated drawdown of the military component of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the additional deployment of two formed police units (FPUs) to support peace and stability in the country. France argued for further cuts in military forces and requested a technical briefing from DPKO to investigate this possibility. Following the meeting, USUN circulated a draft resolution incorporating the SYG's suggestions and extending UNMIL's mandate. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) In Security Council closed consultations on September 9, UNMIL SRSG Ellen Margrethe Loj focused on the fragility of recent gains in Liberia. She said the government and international community are "starting from scratch," forced to build new institutions from the ground up rather than rehabilitate existing ones. She discussed threats to Liberia's security at length, including recent incidents of mob violence, the destabilizing factor of mass unemployment (particularly among youth), widespread rape and gender-based violence and violence linked to illegal rubber tapping and exploitation of natural resources. The SRSG then detailed the Secretary-General's proposal for adjusting the pace of UNMIL's drawdown by accelerating the withdrawal of military forces (from the 500 envisioned by the SYG in August 2007 to 1,460 in the present report) but bolstering the international police presence through the deployment of two additional FPUs. She said that as the Liberian National Police is an unarmed force, UNMIL's military capabilities are called upon daily in order to help maintain stability in the country.

Ten members support SYG's plan

¶3. (SBU) Amb. DiCarlo spoke directly afterwards, voicing her support for the SYG's plan and stating that UNMIL's drawdown must be linked to Liberia's ability to provide for its own security. In her second intervention, she noted U.S. bilateral security assistance to Liberia and stressed the continuing need for UNMIL's military forces in order to respond to incidents of mob violence including attacks on UNMIL. South Africa, Indonesia, Vietnam and Burkina Faso said they fully supported the SYG's recommendation, as did the Libyan PermRep, who praised the SYG's "cautious approach." Belgium said that the SYG's drawdown plan was "adequate," while Croatia supported the SYG's plan for a gradual drawdown linked to benchmarks. China said that Liberia was still in the "initial phase of peaceful reconstruction" and that it supported the SYG's plan. Panama said it trusted the SYG's judgment and reminded members to take UNMIL's regional responsibilities into account before rushing to recommend an overly quick drawdown.

Four line up against, one is "flexible"

14. (SBU) France led the charge for a faster drawdown of UNMIL's military forces, arguing that the SYG's request for more police units indicated that the main threats faced by Liberia were of a civil rather than military nature. French PR Ripert said that the SC needed to take into account the overall peacekeeping situation, including UNAMID in Darfur "where civilians are still being attacked" and MONUC in DRC, "a country twenty times larger than Liberia." France requested a technical meeting of military experts in order to discuss the possibility of further cuts in UNMIL's military forces. (NOTE: The French later specified to USUN that they believe either the military drawdown should be doubled or the renewal period of UNMIL should be reduced from one year to six months. End note.) The UK and Italy supported consideration of a more rapid drawdown, while Costa Rica backed France's call for an acceleration in the withdrawal of military units. Russian DPR Dolgov called for "more decisive action" from the Security Council, but officials at the Russian mission later confirmed that Russia is "flexible" on the timetable for UNMIL's drawdown.

Khalilzad